N° 75. SATURDAY, *July* 8, 1786.

E' troppo barbara quella legge, che vuol disporre del cuor delle donne a costo della loro rovina.

GOLDONI.

To the AUTHOR of the LOUNGER.

SIR, *Avignon, May* 1786.

YOU will perhaps be surprised at receiving a letter from this place; but if you possess that benevolence which from your writings one is led to ascribe to you, the unfortunate from any quarter may claim some of your notice. My story, I believe, will not be without its use; and if you knew that sort of melancholy indulgence which I feel in addressing a letter to my native country!—But I will not give way to feeling; I mean simply to relate; and situated as I am, banished from the world, and lost to myself, I can tell my story,—I think I can,—as that of a third person, in which though I may be interested, I will yet be impartial.

My father possessed a small patrimonial estate in the county of ——, and married, in early

life, a Lady whoſe birth was much above her fortune, and who unluckily retained all the pride of the firſt, tho' it but ill ſuited the circumſtances of the latter. The conſequences were ſuch as might naturally be looked for. My father was involved in an expenſive ſtyle of life, which in a few years obliged him to ſell his eſtate for payment of his debts. He did not live to feel the diſtreſſes to which he might have been reduced; and after his death, my mother took up her reſidence in a country-town, where the pittance that remained from the reverſion of my father's effects, aſſiſted by a ſmall penſion from government, which a diſtant relation of my mother's procured for us, enabled her to educate me on that ſober plan which neceſſity had now taught her to adopt.

Our ſituation, however, ſtill allowed her to mix ſomething of the genteel in my education; and the place in which we lived was inhabited by ſeveral families, who, like us, had retired from more public and expenſive life, and ſtill retained ſomewhat of that poliſh which former intercourſe with the faſhionable world had conferred. At the age of ſeventeen, therefore, I was, I believe, tolerably accompliſhed; and though I knew nothing of high life, nor indeed wiſhed to know it, yet I poſſeſſed a degree of refinement and breeding rather above what the circum-

circumſtances of my mother might have been expected to allow.

Of my beauty I was, like other girls, ſomewhat vain; but my mother was proud to an extreme degree. She looked upon it as a gift by which my fortune and hers were to be made, and conſequently ſpared no poſſible pains to ſet it off to advantage. Its importance and its power were often inculcated on me; and my ambition was daily inflamed by the recital of the wealth and ſtation which other girls had acquired by marriages to which their beauty alone had intitled them. I think I heard thoſe inſtances with more indifference than my mother wiſhed I ſhould; and could not eaſily be brought to conſider all happineſs as centered in riches or in rank, to which her wiſhes and hopes were conſtantly pointed.

Theſe hopes, however, accident put it in her power to accompliſh. At the houſe of one of the genteeleſt of our acquaintance (who had two daughters nearly of my age) we met with Mr. M——, a gentleman whom the lady of the houſe introduced particularly to us, as a man of great fortune and ſingular worth. Mr. M—— was paſt the meridian of life; he had the look and air of a man who had ſeen the world, and talked on moſt ſubjects with a degree of ſhrewd and often ſarcaſtic obſervation, which met with

much applauſe from the older part of the company, but which was not at all calculated to pleaſe the younger. The enthuſiaſm of attachment, of feeling, and of virtue, which our reading ſometimes induced us to mention, he ridiculed as exiſting only in the dreams of poetry, or the fanciful heroes of romance; but which ſenſe and experience neither looked to find in others, nor ventured to indulge in ourſelves. In ſhort, my companions and I hated and feared him; and neither our averſion or our fear was at all removed by the lectures of our mothers on his good ſenſe and agreeable manners.

Theſe lectures were at laſt beſtowed with particular emphaſis on me, and, after a day or two's preamble of general commendations, he was formally propoſed to me by my mother as a huſband. He himſelf, though he made his court chiefly to her, was now pretty ſedulous in his attentions to me; and made many ſpeeches to my beauty, and proteſtations of his love, which I heard with little emotion, but which my mother, and her friend whoſe gueſts we were, repreſented as the genuine expreſſions of the moſt ſincere and ardent attachment. Of love I had formed ſuch ideas as girls of my age generally do; and though I had no particular preference for any one elſe, I did not heſitate in refuſing him, for whom I had hitherto con-

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ceived nothing but disgust. My refusal increased the ardour of my lover in his suit: to me he talked in common-place language of the anguish it caused him; to my mother he spoke in the language of the world, and increased his offers in point of settlement to an exorbitant degree. Her influence was proportionally exerted. She persuaded, implored, and was angry. The luxury and happiness of that state which I might acquire were warmly painted; the folly, the impiety, of depriving myself and her of so comfortable an establishment, was strongly held forth; the good qualities and generosity of Mr. M—— were expatiated on; those ideas which I ventured to plead as reasons for my rejection were ridiculed and exploded.—— At my time of life, unused to resistance, fond of my mother, and accustomed to be guided by her; perhaps, too, somewhat dazzled with the prospect of the situation which this marriage would open to me; it is not surprising that my first resolutions were overcome. I became the wife of Mr. M——.

For some time the happiness they had promised seemed to attend me. My husband was warm, if not tender in his attachment; my wishes for myself were not only indulged, but prompted; and his kindness to my mother and my friends was unbounded. I was grateful to Mr. M——, I regarded, I esteemed, I wished to love him.

On the birth of a ſon, which happened about a year after our marriage, he redoubled his aſſiduities about me. I was more happy, more grateful; I looked on my boy, his father careſſed him; and then it was that I loved Mr. M—— indeed.

This happineſs, however, it was not my good fortune long to enjoy. Some projects of political ambition, in which Mr. —— was engaged, called him from thoſe domeſtic enjoyments which ſeemed for a while to have intereſted him, into more public life. We took up our reſidence in the capital, and Mr. M—— introduced me to what is called the beſt company. Of his own ſociety I ſoon came to enjoy but little. His attachment for me began viſibly to decay, and by degrees he loſt altogether the attentions which for a while outlived it. Sullen and ſilent when we were alone, and either neglectful or contemptuous when we had company, he treated me as one whom it would have degraded him to love or to reſpect; whom it was ſcarce worth while to hate or to deſpiſe. I was conſidered as merely a part of his eſtabliſhment; and it was my duty to do the honours of his table, as it was that of his butler to attend to his ſide-board, or of his groom to take care of his horſes. Like them too, I was to miniſter to his vanity, by the ſplendor of my appearance;

ance; I was to ſhew that beauty of which he was maſter, in company and at public places, and was to carry the trappings with which he had adorned it, to be envied by the poor, and admired by the wealthy. While my affection for him continued, I ſometimes remonſtrated againſt this. His anſwers were firſt indifferent, and then peeviſh. Young, giddy, and fond of amuſement, I at laſt began to enjoy the part he aſſigned me, and entered warmly into that round of diſſipation, which for a while I had paſſed through without reliſh, and often with ſelf-reproach. My ſon, who had been my tie to home, he took from me, to place him in the family of a former tutor of his own, who now kept a French academy; and I never had a ſecond child. My ſociety was made up of the gay and the thoughtleſs; women who, like me, had no duty to perform, no laudable exertion to make; but who in the buſtle of idleneſs were to loſe all thought, and in the forms of the world all honeſt attachment.

For a conſiderable time, however, a ſenſe of right, which I had imbibed in my infancy, roſe up occaſionally to embitter my pleaſures, and to make me aſhamed of the part I was acting. Whenever Mr. M – took the trouble of perceiving this, it ſerved him but as a ſubject for ridicule. The reſtraints of religion, or nice mo-

rality, he was at pains to represent as the effects of fanaticism and pedantry; and when I seemed surprised or shocked at the principles he held forth, he threw in a sneer at my former situation, and hinted, that but for him I had been still the aukward ignorant thing he found me.

Yet this man expected that I should be virtuous, as that word is used by the world; that I should guard that honour which was his, while every other principle of my own rectitude was extinguished. For a long time it was so. My horror at that degree of depravity was not to be overcome, even amidst the levity, to call it no worse, of manners which I saw continually around me, and which, as far as it was a mark of fashion, he seemed to wish me to participate. Still in the possession of youth and beauty, I did not escape solicitations; but I repelled them with a degree of resentment, which I often heard the very man whose honour it guarded treat as affectation in any woman who should pretend it. He would frequently repeat from the Letters of Lord *Chesterfield*, that a declaration of love to a woman was always to be ventured, because, even though it was rejected, she would accept of it as a compliment to her attractions. I had soon opportunities of knowing that Mr. M—— was as loose in his practice as in his principles. His infidelities, indeed, he was not at much pains

pains to conceal; and while I continued to upbraid him, was at almoſt as little pains to excuſe.

In ſuch circumſtances, was it to be wondered at if my virtue was not always proof againſt the attacks to which it was expoſed? With a huſband unequal in years, loſt to my affection, as I was caſt from his, and treating me as one from whom no love or duty was to be expected; a huſband whoſe principles were corrupt, whoſe converſation was looſe, whoſe infidelity gave a ſort of juſtice to mine; ſurrounded at the ſame time by young men whoſe perſons were attractive, whoſe manners were engaging, whoſe obſequious attentions were contraſted with my huſband's neglect, and whoſe pretended adoration and reſpect were oppoſed to his rudeneſs and contempt:—Was it wonderful, that thus ſituated, expoſed to temptation, and unguarded by principle, I ſhould forget firſt the reſtraints of prudence, and then the obligations of virtue?

Reſigned as I now am to my ſituation, I can look on it as a kind interpoſition of Providence, that detection ſoon followed my firſt deviations from virtue, before I had loſt the feelings of ſhame and contrition, before I had wandered an irrecoverable diſtance from duty, from principle, from religion. Here, in this place of baniſhment which the mercy of my huſband allotted me, I have met with ſome benevolent guides,

guides, who have led me to the only ſources of comfort for miſery and remorſe like mine; who have given me a ſtation in which, amidſt the obloquy of the world, amidſt the humiliation of repentance, I can ſtill in ſome degree reſpect myſelf; who have taught me to cultivate my mind, to improve its powers, to regulate its principles; who have led me to a juſter value of this life, to a ſincere hope of the next.

Humbled, and I truſt improved by affliction, I will not indulge either vindication or reſentment; the injuries I have done my huſband I am willing to expiate (as, alas! he knows I do) by penitence and by ſuffering; yet, for his own ſake, and for the warning of others, let me aſk him, If, for theſe injuries to him, and ſufferings to me, he never imputes any blame to himſelf? I am told he is loud in his charges of my ingratitude and perfidy. I again repeat, that I will not offer to apologiſe for my weakneſs or my crimes. But it would be more dignified in him, as well as more juſt, were he to forget rather than to reproach the woman whoſe perſon he bought, whoſe affections he deſpiſed, whoſe innocence he corrupted,—whoſe ruin he has cauſed!

SOPHIA M——.